DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 619 UD 019 873

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TITLE Political Definitions in Research and Educational Programs That Affect Immigrant Children in Hawaii.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the National Association for Asian American and Pacific Education Conference (San Francisco, California, April 25-27, 1979); Not available in paper copy due to reproduction quality of original document

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Asian Americans; Cultural Awareness; Curriculum Development; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Problems; *Educational Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; *Immigrants; *Minority Group Children; *Multicultural Education; Non English Speaking; Political Socialization; Public Schools; Social Values
IDENTIFIERS *Hawaii

ABSTRACT

In this review of studies and programs relating to immigrant children enrolled in public schools in Hawaii, it is suggested that ways in which immigrant children are described has political significance and evaluative implications. Four problems facing immigrant youth were identified by the Hawaii Department of Education. The major problem was described as "English language deficiencies." It is noted that if this description were rephrased, very different programs and explanations would emerge. For example, the problem might be described as "lack of appreciation of the language of immigrant children." The studies reported suggest that the way problems are identified by the Hawaii Department of Education, and the kinds of programs made available, imply that immigrant children should adjust to the existing school setting. The author argues that alternative values or goals such as cultural and language pluralism, role diversity, sociability, equal opportunity and critical skills would call for a different set of school programs and practices. The types of problems identified from the perspective of these alternative values would be very different from the problems now identified. (Author/PMR)

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ED179619

OCT 15 1979

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This paper was presented at the April 1979 National Association of Asian American and Pacific Education Conference which was in part supported by funds from the National Institute of Education. However, the views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy or position of either NIE or NAAAPE; and endorsement of the paper by either organization should not be inferred.

Political Definitions in Research and Educational Programs That Affect Immigrant Children in Hawaii

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Introduction

This paper is a review of studies and programs relating to immigrant children enrolled in public schools in Hawaii. The frame of reference used to organize and critically review these studies and educational policies and practices is based on the idea that the ways in which immigrant children are described has political significance and evaluative implications.* "The selection of concepts in the definition and framing of a problem, then, can be viewed as a political process for this selection determines what is to be changed, what is to be ignored, and, in some cases, who the change agents and who the status quo definders are to

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* This paper relies heavily on the intellectual work of Michael J. Shaprio, "Social Control Idelogies and the Politics of Education." Paper presented at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C., September 5-9, 1972.

1 Michael J. Shapiro, "Social Control Idelogies and the Politics of Education." Paper presented at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C., (September, 1972).

be." [1] I will provide information and comment on issues affecting immigrant children in Hawaii by reviewing studies and policies utilizing this framework. Some of the questions I hope to cover include: who defines what is a problem? what is the situation? who is defined as a problem? who is required to change or adjust? what are the values underlying programs and educational practices? what is the content and style of instruction? what are the effects on the participants in the Hawaii educational setting?

Descriptions and Labels

We all use words and concepts to describe phenomena, to share information, to state interrelationships and so on. We always define and delimit with concepts or labels. "The problem is not one of labeling or not labeling but rather one of the significance that one attaches to the labels employed." [2] Some philosophers argue that there are evaluative components to simple descriptions. The following sentences may indicate simple factual descriptions: "Juanita does not speak English." "France is a Hexagon" "It is cold." "Brown hit a homerun." Deciding whether Brown hit a homerun requires knowledge about the game of baseball. The statement that "Juanita does not speak English" may imply different things to different people. John Austin has pointed out that "France is a hexagon" may be true for an army general planning military strategy but not for a geographer.

There are many things Juanita does in addition to not speaking English, yet this description of Juanita might be the description most relevant to some observers to utilize. One can judge a description and/or an explanation on scientific norms of evidence and logic. And one can also judge the same description or explanation on pragmatic and political grounds: "What is the explanation or description good for? Who can use it? "The concepts selected for an explanation enfranchise some persons by producing a conceptualization they can use and disenfranchise others, who are ineligible or unable to use the expianation." [3] Michael Shapiro illustrates this point with the example of "hyperactive" children in classrooms.

> "Teachers in primary school classrooms frequently find that their attempts at communicating with groups of children are frustrated by their differing attention spans. They have found (much to their delight in many cases) that the attention span of a child is markedly influenced by body chemistry and that drugs prescribed by physicians frequently 'calm down' what are referred to as 'hyperactive' children to a point where they no longer create classroom disturbances by leaving their chairs and moving around while instruction is being attempted. On scientific grounds, the empirical explanation employed (in this case a bio-chemical one) is valid. There is good evidence that the classroom activity of

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[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

the child is related to his body chemistry. The use of such an explanation, however, takes as given that children should learn while sitting together in groups on a schedule chosen by the school or the teacher. The hyperactive child concept is an arbitrary one in that the criterion for calling a child hyperactive is social not biological. The fact that a chemical-biological type of explanation is often relied upon for a 'deviant behavior problem' is a consequence of the educational value premise suggested above (order maintenance). From an alternative from of reference, one could regard the teacher's problem as a strategic one. One could take as given the fact that children have differing interests and attention spans and ask how one might educate large numbers of them nevertheless. If the question is posed this way, the kind of expirical explanation sought would probably not be chemical-biological. One relevant explanation, for example, would be oriented toward understanding why teachers feel that all children in the classroom should have the same daily learning schedule. The concepts in such an explanation would probably be something like past training, current role expectations, etc. Once again the validity of the explanation would be determined upon scientific grounds, but the choice of the type of explanation to be employed and the concepts contained in it would derive from the value premises which precipitated the inquiry."[4]

Who Defines? Who Gets Defined? Who Has to Change?

In 1975, the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) identified four major problems facing immigrant youth:[5]

1. English language deficiencies
2. Difficulty in socializing with local students
3. Apparent lack of relevant schooling in their native country
4. Difficulty in understanding the value system of the American society

If these problems were rephrased, very different programs and explanations emerge:

1. Lack of appreciation of the language of immigrant children
2. Difficulty of local children to socialize with immigrant youth
3. Apparent lack of relevant curriculum appropriate to the amount of schooling experience by immigrant children
4. Difficulty in understanding and appreciating the values and culture of the immigrant children

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4 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

5 Letter from Supt. Teichiro Hirata, Superintendent of the Department of Education to the Senate Ways and Means Committee, Honolulu, Hawaii, (February 4, 1975).

The way these problems are defined by the Department of Education requires that adjustments must be made by the immigrant child. In the DOE definition of the problem it is possible to interpret what is the behavior desired of immigrant children and for them to conform to the expectations of the dominant values of American society.

In the same year, 1975, a Filipino community group also defined problems they saw facing immigrant Filipino youth in Hawaii. They came up with very different problems, explanations and solutions. The Filipino community group identified problems in the curriculum, peer relations, school personnel qualifications and parent-school relations. Their problem definitions were based on an entirely different set of premises and concepts. Some of their statements are:

> The school curriculum does not contain sufficient or accurate information about the history and culture of ethnic groups in Hawaii.
>
> There is a lack of representative languages of minority groups in the intermediate and high schools.
>
> Elementary school-age immigrants are able to adapt so effectively to the dominant standard and pidgin English that they often lose the ability to speak and converse in their native tongue. This phenomenon could eventually lead to difficulty in the home and loss of an important aspect of the child's cultural heritage.

It is clear that there are many ways to describe a phenomenon and many ways to define what is the problem in a give situation. What is defined as a problem is linked to who is viewing the problem and the values held by the observer. The person whose definitions are accepted and acted upon has power. In the illustration above, the definition of the Department of Education was generally accepted. "The major consequence of possessing the power to label persons as deviants or problems is that one can define the problem in a way that requires others to make the adjustment." [6]

A problem commonly identified in Hawaii is that "immigrant children get into fights" and/or have "difficulty socializing with local students." In 1975, a Filipino psychiatrist and a social worker, Ponce and Lee, wrote a report based on an incident where a local Hawaii-born Filipino boy was stabbed by a Filipino immigrant boy. [7] They offered the explanation that the following factors are far more relevant in determining violence than the tensions between immigrant and local Filipino youth."

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6 "Status Report of the Oahu Filipino Community Council Task Force on Education," Honolulu, Hawaii, (February 9, 1975), 17 pp..

7 Danilo E. Ponce, M.D. and Vincent Lee, M.S.W., "Inter-ethnic Violence in a Hawaii School: A Mental Health Consultation Experience." Paper presented at the Conference on International Migration from the Philippines, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, (1975).

1. sudden disruption of support and control system (parents and neighbors are more available in the Philippines)
2. pre-morbid personality of the child (most of the children involved had beginning behavior problems in the Philippines)
3. culture-bound traits as regards aggression (Filipinos, in general have difficulty in expressing and coping with aggression)
4. lack of viable identification figures and an apathy about the future

My very strong disagreement with the validity and utility of these explanations offered is based partly on the fact that it ignores several statements made by the immigrant boys who saw the immigrant-local tension as important. The researchers reported that the boys interviewed claimed that "a sarcastic remark directed to him by a local student triggered the stabbing incident." [8] Ponce and Lee dismiss the importance of this variable and state that "the immigrant youth had elaborate rationalizations and projections and role reversals so that the immigrant can accept the derogatory statements abouth his being a Filipino immigrant." [9] The explanations seem to put too much burden or "blame" on the immigrant youth. These researchers also made various recommendations for changes which for the most part require the immigrant youth to do most of the changing and very little for the host community or local youth. Another difficulty with the study is that it offers very little detail and evidence to substantiate some of the broad generalizations about Filipino culture.

In the same year, I completed a survey of Hawaii local and immigrant youth.[10] My study is not exactly comparable to the Ponce and Lee study but they were similar in that both studies tried to explain why immigrant youth are involved in fights in the school. My approach and explanations are quite different from those offered by Ponce and Lee for I place great importance in the effects of local and immigrant youth interactions and perceptions of each other. The variables I chose and the sample selected for the study indicates my approach and definition of the problems facing immigrant youth in the schools. The study sample included both local-born and immigrant youth because I felt that their perceptions of each other was a relevant variable in understanding the tensions in the schools. In addition, I included questions about teachers, the school setting, family information, language, attitudes and expectations about a variety of topics. Probably the reasons the two studies are so different include differences in the researcher's academic training, profession, research methodology and also differences in theories about deviancy and social control. Two different models or theories used by researchers and practictioners were used in the studies. These models are themselves ideological and include value premises and political implications. The dominant model is identified as the "welfare model." The problem person is identified and is seen as needing "remedial and rehabilitative action which is directed toward changing and 'correcting' the attributes of that person." [11] The other model is the "societal reaction" or labeling theory". "Deviance is what society calls deviance and that the propensities for calling a particular type of behavior deviant are a function of ideological

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8 Ibid., p. 3.

9 Ibid., p. 4.

10 Amefil Agbayani-Cahill, et al., "A Study of Immigrant and Non-immigrant Youth on Oahu," Honolulu, Hawaii, (December, 1975). A report prepared by the Behavioral Research group for the Lau Enforcement Assistance Administration Program, Office of Human resources, City and County of Honolulu.

11 Shapiro, op. cit., p. 8.

"Yes, because I'm an immigrant and I get along with local students and what I think the immigrants should do is to dress the way locals do, speak English all the time, be very friendly, stick around with them and not staying with your own nationality. Do the lifestyle of the locals. When you get into a fight don't use weapons like knife, belt, gun and others and fight fair and not have your friend involved. I think you should let the locals be higher rank than you are and let them accept you. I have been living here for five years and I act like locals and I don't want to consider myself as P.I. [Philippine Islands]. I feel ashamed of my own nationality." [13]

Rosenthal and Jacobson's classic study show that children are influenced by the expectations of their teachers.[14] In their experiments, teachers were told that certain children in their classrooms were brighter and were expected to do better than other children. Actually there were no difference between the children who were in fact randomly chosen and identified as bright. The children who were "expected" to show greater intellectual gains actually performed better on objective tests. Furthermore the teachers viewed these supposed brighter children as happier and more interesting and having a better chance of success than other children. The authors of this study suggest that poor and ethnic minority children perform poorly in school because that is what is expected of them. "In other words, his shortcomings may originate not in his different ethnic, cultural and economic background but in his teachers' response to that background."[15] In like manner, immigrant youth may perform in a particular way in the classroom and in the playground because of what is "expected" of them, i.e. in response to the way others define and relate to them. The problems facing immigrant children might lie in the teacher's attitutde and expectation of the child and/or the attitudes and expectations of the local-born child.

A study of Hawaii high school seniors was conducted in 1976.[16] This study included a few items that may help explain some of the difficulties facing immigrant youth in Hawaii public school if considered in the framework of "societal reaction" or labeling theory. The students were asked the following questions:

1. Are there any ethnic groups in your school which are unfriendly or 'stuck up' towards you and your friends? If so which ones?
2. Are there any ethnic groups which your friends do not like to associate with in your school?
3. Have your parents ever mentioned that they would prefer you not to associate with students from any of these ethnic groups?
4. Do the students in your school who hassle you or 'bully' other students tend to come from any particular ethnic group?
5. In general, do you think the teachers in your school have negative attitudes toward any ethnic groups or seem 'down' on students from any of these social backgrounds?

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13 Amefil Agbayani-Cahill, et al., op. cit., p. 88.

14 Robert Rosenthal and Lenore S. Jacobson, "Teacher Expectations for the Disadvantaged," *Scientific American*, 218 [4], (April, 1968).

15 Ibid., p. 3.

16 Eldon L. Wegner, et al., "The Social Climate of Public High School in Hawaii." A report submitted to the State of Hawaii Legislative Research Bureau, Honolulu, Hawaii, (July, 1976), pp. 7-8.

Students were allowed to check more than one of the groups listed including a category "No group different from other." The pattern of responses was similar for all the questions except for question 4. Responses to the first question are: 50% said no group different from others, and rated as unfriendly Filipino immigrants 19%, Mainland Haoles (caucasians) 18%, Korean immigrants 16%, Samoans 16%, Chinese immigrants 11%, Local Japanese 11%, Hawaiians or Part Hawaiians 9%, Local Haoles 6%, Local Koreans 5%, Local Filipinos 5%, Local Portuguese 4%, Local Chinese 3%. The responses show non-Hawaii-born students are rated as "unfriendly."

It is interesting that 56% of the children think that teachers see the groups as being no different from any other group. It is also interesting that three of the groups (Samoans 15%, Filipino immigrants 14%, and Hawaiians-Part Hawaiians 12%) are rated as groups they think teachers "have negative attitudes toward" or seem "down" on. It is precisely these three groups that continue to have a difficult time and perform poorly in the schools.

Values Underlying the Choice of Concepts, Explanations and Programs

A common view is that immigrant children are the problem and are deviant. The way problems were identified by the DOE and the kinds of programs made available imply that immigrant children should "fit in" and "adjust' to the existing school setting. Until recently, all the programs required the immigrant child to adjust rather than sharing such an adjustment with the institution, the teacher and the local-born child. The programs seen as appropriate were: English as a Second Language, orientation programs to teach immigrants about the culture and history of the new community, tutorial and remedial programs. A change in focus or a change in the description of the problem would change the clientele and the programs. For example, if the local-born child were seen as significantly contributing to the problems of immigrant youth, an appropriate program would be a course for local children that would provide them with information and cultural experiences about the home cultures and history of the immigrants, or a set of activities that would make it rewarding for immigrant and local-born children to interact cooperatively.

The two dominant values that seem to operate in the schools are:

1. order maintenance
2. conformity to a dominant middle-class American culture

Alternative values or goals such as cultural and language pluralism, role diversity, sociability, equal opportunity and critical skills would call for a very different set of programs and practices in the schools. The types of problems identified from the perspectives of these different values would be very different than are the problems now identified.

The arguments for bilingual education and multicultural education have been based on the value of cultural and language pluralism, pedagogical utility, equal opportunity and civil rights. Arguments used in Hawaii (and elsewhere) against bilingual education for maintenance of language and culture are based on different value premises. Foremost among these reasons is economic and social expediency and utility. A memo written by a Department of Education staff member in 1973 states that "those who want to advance themselves economically have to master the English language. . . Those who have clung too strongly to their native language and culture have for the most part been penalized by the dominant group and limited to low-paying menial jobs."17 This "description" and explanation on

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17 Memo from Thomas Hale to Dr. Clarence Masumoto, State of Hawaii, Department of Education, Honolulu, Hawaii, (February 15, 1975), p. 2.

scientific grounds may in fact correspond to many persons' observations. It is also used to justify the acceptance of this state of affairs and is used to make minorities and immigrants adjust. It is based on the acceptance of a single dominant culture as existing and as desirable.

"Why are our educational programs continuing to direct their energies toward a mythical central culture that does not exist anywhere; and why do our schools thus continue to be the agents of degradation and shame for so many youngsters who are made acutely aware of the differences from the 'norm'."[18] "This ideological commitment and its application to the schools is particularly destructive for children of ethnic minorities who represent an enormously diverse American culture."[19]

Conclusion

Education usually consists of subject matter learning where information is presented in an objective manner. History, math, physics, economics, etc. are presented as though they are descriptions of the world. This style of presenting information encourages students to view "reality" as given or that there is only one way of looking at reality. There are however, many geometries (Euclidean is just one of many), many different and often contradictory histories and many different economic theories. "Capitalist economics is a useful approach for children of the white middle classes but not for children from most Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano families. Yet all are taught the same economics as though it were a description of what exchange systems are and must be."[20] Children are rarely taught that words and concepts not only describe events but that there may be multiple and varied descriptions of the same events. In addition, children are rarely informed that the words and descriptions used in classrooms and elsewhere may have strategic or pragmatic significance.

The supporters of bilingual education and multicultural education want changes in the curriculum. They want to include information about the culture, history and contributions of various ethnic minorities and to assure that these are presented in a favorable and reasonable manner. However, a more important change that should be incorporated is a change in the teaching style that encourages children to accept everything as a fact (including "cultural facts"). The change in curriculum and teaching style that minority group supporters should be asking for is a change in teaching that encourages children to understand that there are many different ways to describe reality, that different values may alter our perception of what is reality, and that information about reality is oftentimes used to favor or benefit certain persons or groups. Curriculum that includes the cultures and histories of minorities could help all children gain different perspectives from different cultures. The ablility to speak and learn in more than one language may empower children because it gives them the experience of using different labels/words.

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18 S. Charnofsky, *Educating the Powerless*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971), quoted in Shapiro, op. cit., p. 15.

19 Ibid., p. 15.

20 Ibid., pp. 17-18.

There is no escape from using labels and concepts. It is possible however to be cautious in thinking that a particular label or description is the only possible one. It is also possible to continously review other ways of describing a phenomena and determining who is benefitted and who is not. A significant contribution to students, minority and majority students alike, is that they be provided with many perspectives to view reality. It seems to me that the values implicit in supporting bilingual education and muticultural education are consistent with this ideal of empowering students by providing them with multiple perspectives and experiences.